



Rwanda: Background and Current Developments

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Summary

In 2003, Rwanda held its first multi-party presidential and parliamentary elections in decades. President Paul Kagame of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) won 95% of the votes cast, while his nearest rival, Faustin Twagiramungu, received 3.6% of the votes cast. In the legislative elections, the ruling RPF won 73% in the 80-seat National Assembly, while the remaining seats went to RPF allies and former coalition partners. In September 2008, Rwanda held legislative elections, and the RPF won a majority of the seats. Rwandese women are now the majority in the National Assembly. In October 2008, the National Assembly elected Ms. Mukantabam Rose as the first female speaker of the Assembly. The next presidential elections are scheduled for August 9, 2010.

In Rwanda, events of a prior decade are still fresh in the minds of many survivors and perpetrators. In 1993, after several failed efforts, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and the government of Rwanda reached an agreement in Tanzania, referred to as the Arusha Peace Accords. The RPF joined the Rwandan government as called for in the agreement. In April 1994, the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi, along with several senior government officials, were killed when their plane was shot down as it approached the capital of Rwanda, Kigali. Shortly after, the Rwandan military and a Hutu militia known as the Interhamwe began to systematically massacre Tutsis and moderate Hutu opposition members. In the first 10 weeks of the Rwandan genocide, an estimated 1 million people, mostly Tutsis, were slaughtered by government forces and the Interhamwe militia. In July 1994, the RPF took over power and later formed a coalition government.

In late 2008, the governments of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) agreed on a wide range of issues. The two governments agreed to launch a joint military offensive against the National Congress for the Defense of the Congolese People (CNDP) and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). They also agreed to restore full diplomatic relations and to activate economic cooperation. In January 2009, Rwanda and Congo launched the joint military operation in eastern Congo. In late February 2009, Rwandese troops pulled out of Congo as part of the agreement with the Kabila government. In October 2009, Ugandan authorities arrested a top genocide suspect, Idelphonse Nizeyimana. He was later transferred to Tanzania to stand trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

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Recent Developments

In early June 2010, Peter Erlinder, a professor at the William Mitchell College of Law and a defense lawyer at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), was arrested in Rwanda for denying the 1994 genocide. Professor Erlinder claims that he is being targeted by the Rwandan government because of his work at the ICTR. Rwandan authorities assert that he is being investigated for his activities outside his ICTR work. Erlinder claims that he went to Rwanda to represent opposition leader Victoire Ingabire, although there is no evidence that he was asked by Ingabire to represent her in court, nor did he ask permission from the Rwandan Bar Association, which is a requirement by law. Professor Erlinder informed the U.S. embassy about his presence in Rwanda and his desire to leave within a few days. Shortly after his arrest, Erlinder began to complain about health issues, and reportedly tried to kill himself by swallowing prescription drugs. He was visited by embassy officials routinely while in detention, and provided medical care by Rwandan doctors. In late June, the Rwandan High Court ordered his release on medical grounds. Family members, through the State Department, provided his medical records to Rwandan authorities. According to Rwandan authorities, the record showed that Professor Erlinder is mentally unstable.

In mid-July 2010, the vice chairman of the Democratic Green Party, Andre Kagwa Rwisereka, was killed, and his decapitated body was dumped near a river in Butare, Rwanda. Mr. Rwisereka, who is also an owner of a nightclub, had expressed concern about his safety weeks before his killing. Rwandan authorities arrested one suspect, who was at the nightclub after it was closed.

In late June 2010, a Rwandan journalist, Jean Leonard Rugambage, was killed outside his home. Prior to his work as a journalist, he served in the former Rwandan Armed Forces and was convicted of crimes committed during the genocide. Rwandan authorities arrested a suspect, who said he had killed Mr. Rugambage because his brother was murdered during the genocide by Mr. Rugambage. The killing was triggered after Mr. Rugambage invited the suspect to his wedding, according to Rwandan officials.

Since January 2010, numerous grenade attacks in Kigali, the capital, killed and wounded dozens of people. The latest attacks took place in mid-May, killing two and wounding 32 people. The government of Rwanda blamed two former senior army officers, including Lt. General Kayumba Nyamwasa, who was in exile in Uganda and later left for South Africa. In June 2010, General Nyamwasa was shot in the stomach in Johannesburg, South Africa. The government of South Africa arrested six suspects, including two Tanzanians, one Mozambican, a Somali, and two Rwandese nationals. One of the Rwandese prisoners was released a few days later. The driver of General Nyamwasa was also arrested, although South African authorities have not announced his arrest.

In May 2010, President Kagame was endorsed by the ruling RPF as the party's presidential candidate, in advance of elections scheduled to take place on August 9, 2010. A number of other political parties are expected to endorse President Kagame. Several other parties, however, are expected to run against the ruling RPF. The United Democratic Forces (UDF), led by Victoire Ingabire; the Green Party, led by Frank Habineza; and Party Social (PS-Imberakuri), led by Bernard Ntaganda, are expected to challenge President Kagame. In March 2010, Mr. Ntaganda was ousted as party president. In May 2010, the UDF and PS-Imberakuri requested postponement of the August 2010 elections reportedly to ensure free and fair elections.

In April 2010, Victoire Ingabire was arrested on charges of promoting genocide ideology; denying the 1994 genocide; and collaborating with a Rwandan rebel group based in the Democratic Republic of Congo. She was later released on bail. In January 2010, Ms. Ingabire returned to Rwanda after 16 years in exile in Europe. Ms. Ingabire is also suspected of having links with members of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). The opposition leader has traveled to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and met with some of the leaders of the FDLR, according to senior Rwandan officials. One of the commanders of the FDLR, who Ingabire met in the DRC, is currently in prison in Rwanda.

Rwanda: Background

Rwanda, a landlocked nation the size of Maryland, is one of the poorest in sub-Saharan Africa. The population is largely comprised of two ethnic groups, the Tutsis (about 14%), who had been the dominant political and economic force until 1961, and the majority Hutu (about 85%), who took power at independence. Shortly after independence, many Rwandese Tutsi left Rwanda and became refugees in Uganda. For decades, Rwanda suffered from periodic ethnic clashes in which hundreds of thousands died. In 1990, the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) launched a military offensive from Uganda against government troops inside Rwanda. Government forces were able to repel the RPF and force it to retreat into the mountains. In 1993, after several failed efforts, the RPF and the government of Rwanda reached an agreement in Tanzania, referred to as the Arusha Peace Accords.

In April 1994, the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi, along with several senior government officials, were killed when their plane was shot down as it approached the capital of Rwanda, Kigali. The Rwandan military and Hutu militia soon began to systematically massacre Tutsis and moderate Hutu opposition members. In the first 10 weeks of the Rwandan genocide, an estimated 1 million people, mostly Tutsis, were slaughtered by government forces and the Interhamwe militia. Millions of Hutu refugees fled to the neighboring DRC—then Zaire—after RPF troops took control in Kigali and ousted the Hutu government in July 1994. In 1996, most of the refugees returned home after RPF troops attacked militias and former Rwandan government troops inside Congo.

The Rwandan intervention in Congo led to the ouster of the Zairean president, Mobutu Sese Seko. Insurgent leader Laurent Kabila became president of the Congo with the help of the RPF-led government of Rwanda and Uganda. However, violence related to the Rwandan upheaval continued in Congo for much of the late 1990s. Rwanda is still very divided along ethnic lines, and the 1994 genocide is fresh in the minds of many survivors and perpetrators. However, resentment among the majority Hutu population toward the Tutsis appears to have decreased in part due to reconciliation efforts by the government. In 2000, the Hutu president and a leading figure of the ruling RPF, Pasteur Bizimungu, resigned in protest of “Tutsi domination” in government. But Bizimungu was not able to garner support for his cause. In April 2000, one month after President Bizimungu resigned, General Paul Kagame, who had served as defense minister and vice president since July 1994, was elected by the Rwandan legislature to the post of president.

Political Conditions

In March 2001, Rwanda held its first local elections in over 30 years. The turnout was estimated at about 90%, and the elections were monitored by 200 international observers. The United Nations Special Representative for Human Rights in Rwanda, Michel Moussali, called the elections a success despite some “technical problems.” *Human Rights Watch* criticized the elections, arguing that people were forced to vote and that the elections were not transparent. Between May and August 2002, the government of Rwanda organized hundreds of meetings throughout the country to seek the input of the people of Rwanda for the draft constitution. A referendum on the draft constitution was passed in May 2003.

Rwanda at a Glance

Population: 11 Million

Population Growth: 2.8% (2010 est.)

Comparative Area: Slightly smaller than Maryland

Languages: Kinyarwanda (official), French, English

Life Expectancy: 57.46 years

HIV/AIDS-adult prevalence rate: 2.8% (2007)

Ethnic Groups: Hutu 84%, Tutsi 15%, Twa 1%

Religions: Roman Catholic: 56.5%, Protestant: 26%, Adventist: 11.1%, Muslim: 4.6%

GDP-Purchasing power parity: \$10.13 billion (2009)

GDP per capita: \$900 (2009)

Source: CIA—The World Factbook 2010.

In August 2003, Rwanda held its first multi-party presidential and parliamentary elections in decades. President Kagame won 95% of the votes cast, while his nearest rival, Faustin Twagiramungu, received 3.6% of the votes cast. In the legislative elections, the ruling RPF won 73% in the 80-seat National Assembly, while the remaining seats went to RPF allies and former coalition partners. Twagiramungu charged that the elections were flawed and that government officials intimidated his supporters.

The European Union Observer Mission also charged that there were election irregularities and that intimidation of opposition candidates was widespread. However, support for President Kagame and the RPF was widespread and cut across ethnic lines.¹ Analysts note that the RPF was well organized and financed and that none of the opposition candidates had a political party base or a clear slogan. President Kagame also benefitted from key endorsements, including from all of the Hutu-dominated political parties and one of the presidential candidates, who withdrew several days before the elections. In September 2008, Rwanda held elections for the National Assembly. The RPF won the majority of the seats. Rwandese women took the majority (56.2%) of the seats, and the Assembly elected the first female speaker of Parliament in October 2008. The next presidential elections are set for August 9, 2010. In January 2010, the head of the Electoral Commission of Rwanda resigned from his position in the ruling party, the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF).

The ruling RPF remains the dominant political force in the country, although there are a number of opposition parties. President Kagame remains a strong leader within the RPF, and no one has emerged within the party to challenge his leadership. A number of independents and individuals from other political parties hold key positions in government, including the posts of prime minister, internal security minister, and justice minister. Rwanda also has the largest percentage of

¹ Ted Dagne spent several days in August 2003 in Rwanda and met with many people, including with the presidential candidates, including Mr. Twagiramungu, President Kagame, ambassadors and observers from European Union, U.S. embassy officials and Rwandan election officials.

women in parliament in the world. Women also hold key ministerial positions, including the minister of foreign affairs. In March 2008, President Kagame implemented a major cabinet reshuffle.² Three senior ministers were reportedly demoted, several other ministers were moved to other positions, five ministries were disbanded, and three new ministries were created. In early 2008, President Kagame ordered the confiscation of land owned by senior military officers for redistribution to peasants.

Human Rights Conditions

Human rights conditions in Rwanda are poor, according to human rights groups and Rwanda experts. According to the State Department's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2009*,

Citizens' right to change their government was effectively restricted. Violence against genocide survivors and witnesses by unknown assailants resulted in deaths. There were reports of abuse of suspects by security forces and local defense members, and prison and detention center conditions remained generally harsh. Security forces arbitrarily arrested and detained persons. Prolonged pretrial detention was a problem. There were restraints on judicial independence and limits on freedoms of speech, press, association, and religion. The government forcibly returned refugees. Official corruption and restrictions on civil society remained a problem.³

In 2001, the government of Rwanda began to implement a local justice system known as *Gacaca* in order to deal with the large backlog of cases from the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Tens of thousands of suspects have been released under the *Gacaca* system, and the *Gacaca* courts are expected to complete their work by the end of 2010. In March 2008, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) signed an agreement with the government of Rwanda to transfer some of the genocide suspects to Rwanda. In June 2008, a British court agreed to Rwanda's request for the extradition of four Rwandese accused of genocide. In February 2009, a former Rwandan priest, Emmanuel Rukundo, was sentenced to 25 years in prison for genocide. In December 2008, the ICTR sentenced Colonel Theoneste Bagosora and two other military officers to life in prison for genocide. Colonel Bagosora is widely considered as the architect of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Meanwhile, in February 2009, a Belgium court decided to drop the cases of two senior Rwanda military officials, Lt. General Charles Kayonga and Brig. General Jack Nziza. These cases were triggered after a French judge issued an arrest warrant for several senior Rwandese government officials.

In March 2009, the United States imposed a travel ban and asset freeze on five FDLR leaders: Sylvestre Mudacumura, Callixte Mbarushimana, Pacifique Ntawunguka, Leopold Mujambere, and Stanislas Nzeyimana. The FDLR is a group led by former Rwandan military officers and militia leaders who are accused of being the masterminds of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The United Nations imposed similar measures against four of the five FDLR members. In August 2009, Congolese authorities arrested genocide suspect Gregoire Ndahimana in eastern Congo. Mr. Ndahimana was mayor of Kivumu and is accused of killing Tutsi civilians at the Nyange parish. He is expected to be transferred to the ICTR soon. Meanwhile, in August 2009, the ICTR sentenced former Governor of Kigali Tharcisse Renzaho to life in prison. The three-judge panel

² The Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU), May 2008.

³ <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/>

found Renzaho guilty of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. In October 2009, Ugandan authorities arrested a top genocide suspect, Idelphonse Nizeyimana. He was later transferred to Tanzania to stand trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Nizeyimana was wanted for orchestrating the killings of tens of thousands of civilians during the Rwandan genocide in 1994. The United States had offered a \$5 million reward for his arrest.

On November 4, 2008, German authorities released the Secretary General of the FDLR, Callixte Mbarushimana, who was arrested in Frankfurt in July 2008. The State Department criticized the release of the FDLR official and blamed the group as the “root cause of instability in eastern Congo.”⁴ A week after the release of the FDLR official, German authorities arrested a senior Rwandese government official, Rose Kabuye. She was arrested because a French judge had issued an arrest warrant for nine senior Rwandese leaders he accused of shooting down the plane that carried the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi in 1994. Rose Kabuye was a liberation fighter with the RPF, the group that ended the 1994 genocide, and served in different government positions over the past decade, including as mayor of Kigali and personal secretary of President Kagame.⁵ The government of Rwanda condemned the arrest and later expelled the German ambassador to Rwanda. On November 19, 2008, Kabuye was transferred to France to stand trial.

Economic Conditions

Rwanda’s economy is market-based and primarily driven by the agricultural sector. More than 85% of the labor force is engaged in subsistence agriculture. In 2007, agriculture accounted for 36.2% of the gross domestic product (GDP) and 40.2% of exports.⁶ The Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU) forecasts a 6% growth for 2010 and 7.5% for 2011. The inflation rate for 2010-2011 is expected to reach 8.5%. In February 2008, Rwanda’s economic performance was given IMF’s approval under the poverty reduction and growth facility (PRGF). In August 2009, Rwanda received a positive review from the IMF. The government of Rwanda has carried out a number of economic reform programs in the past several years, especially in privatization and banking. A number of government-owned companies were sold to the private sector, including Rwanda’s mobile phone company.

Rwanda in Congo and Regional Issues

Insecurity in the Great Lakes region has been a major concern since the mid-1990s, although in the past year conditions have improved significantly. Relations between Rwanda and the DRC have improved in recent years, and the two countries cooperate on a wide range of issues, including on security matters. Rwanda helped facilitate dialogue between the Kabila government and some political groups in the DRC on issues related to the 2006 elections. In November 2007, the governments of the DRC and Rwanda signed an agreement in Kenya “on a common approach to end the threat posed to peace and stability” in the Great Lakes region. The parties agreed to end political and material support to armed groups in the region. The government of the DRC agreed to disarm the ex-FAR (former Rwandan Armed Forces) and Interhamwe militia and to hand over those individuals

⁴ State Department Press Release, November 13, 2008.

⁵ CRS interview with senior Rwandan government official, November 2008.

⁶ State Department *Background Note* for Rwanda, February 2008.

wanted by the government of Rwanda and ICTR. According to the agreement, those who do not wish to return to Rwanda will be placed in a camp away from the border until a solution is found.

Recent Developments

In late 2008, the governments of Rwanda and Congo agreed on a wide range of issues. The two governments agreed to launch a joint military offensive against the National Congress for the Defense of the Congolese People (CNDP) and the FDLR. They also agreed to restore full diplomatic relations and to activate economic cooperation. In January 2009, Rwanda and Congo launched the joint military operation in eastern Congo. The military operation dislodged and seriously weakened the CNDP forces. In January, the leader of the CNDP, General Laurent Nkunda, was arrested inside Rwanda, after he fled eastern Congo. The FDLR forces were also dislodged from their stronghold in north Kivu and forced to retreat. More than 20,000 Rwandese refugees returned home since late 2008, including an estimated 5,000 ex-combatants, according to United Nations officials. In late February 2009, Rwandese troops pulled out of Congo as part of the agreement with the Kabila government. The government of Congo has requested the extradition of General Nkunda. Nkunda still remains under arrest in Rwanda as of May 2010. Congolese forces continue to go after the remaining CNDP and FDLR forces. As part of an earlier agreement, those CNDP forces willing to join the Congolese army are being integrated. Rwanda is also welcoming FDLR forces willing to return home. Meanwhile, remnants of the FDLR continue to target Congolese civilians. In late April 2009, United Nations officials accused the FDLR of committing serious atrocities against civilians in Luofu, a town north of Goma.

In October 2008, the forces of the CNDP launched a major offensive against the Democratic Republic of Congo Armed Forces (FARDC) in eastern Congo. General Nkunda is considered an ally of Rwanda, and argues he is there to protect his community against the FDLR and Congolese forces. Within days, the CNDP captured a number of small towns and Congolese forces retreated in large numbers. The U.N. Mission in Congo (MONUC) also withdrew from some areas and pulled most of its forces into Goma. In late October, General Nkunda declared a unilateral cease-fire and ordered his forces to remain outside Goma. The cease-fire has been violated in recent weeks by both sides, although fighting has not spread to other parts of Congo.

The DRC government initially accused Rwanda of supporting General Nkunda, although a few days later the government seemed to back off from that position. Rwanda has consistently argued that its forces, while deployed along the Rwanda-DRC border, have not crossed into Congolese territory, a position supported by U.S. and United Nations officials.⁷ In late October, at the height of the crisis, the Congolese foreign minister paid a visit to Kigali and met with President Kagame and other Rwandese leaders. At that meeting, the minister did not raise the issue of Rwanda's alleged involvement in support of Nkunda.⁸ A few days later, the Rwandese foreign minister visited Kinshasa and met with Congolese officials as well as other foreign leaders.

⁷ Ted Dagne met with MONUC, Rwandese, and U.S. officials in Eastern Congo and Rwanda in August 2008.

⁸ CRS interview in late October 2008 with a senior Rwandese official in Kigali by phone.

U.S.-Rwanda Relations

Relations between Rwanda and the United States are considered warm. In August 2009, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton praised Rwanda's economic performance during a speech at the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) Forum in Nairobi, Kenya. Secretary Clinton stated that

progress sometimes comes so slowly. But in a country that had been ravaged by genocidal conflict, the progress is amazing. It has one of the fastest growing economies in Africa, even in the midst of the global recession. Health indicators are improving. The Rwandan people believed in themselves. And their leaders, led by President Kagame, believed in policies based on evidence and measurable results, including a nationwide emphasis on family planning, cross-cutting partnerships with donors and NGOs, a greater premium on professionalism in the government and the health sector.

In October 2007, in her testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, then-Assistant Secretary of State Jendayi Frazer stated that "Rwanda has become a very reliable partner in the promotion of economic growth in Central Africa and an important contributor to African peacekeeping."⁹ In February 2008, President Bush visited Rwanda and opened the new U.S. Embassy in Kigali. In his speech, President Bush stated that "in many nations, women have exercised the right to vote and run for office. Rwanda now has the highest percentage of female legislators in the world." President Bush praised Rwanda's peacekeeping efforts in Darfur. Rwanda also is seen as an important partner in the war against terror. The Bush Administration credited Rwanda for taking a number of measures, including combating terrorist financing.

The United States provides significant assistance to Rwanda, especially in the health care sector. The United States provided \$140.4 million to Rwanda in FY2007 and \$158.6 million in FY2008. In FY2009, Rwanda received \$195.8 million and in FY2010 an estimated \$208.1 million. The Obama Administration has requested \$240.2 million for FY2011. In addition, Rwanda receives assistance under the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) and is also a focus country of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). In November 2006, Rwanda was named eligible for Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) Threshold Program. In October 2008, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) signed a \$24.7 million Threshold Program with Rwanda.¹⁰ The Threshold Program will focus on political rights, civil liberties, and support ongoing Rwandan reform efforts.

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⁹ Exploring the U.S. Role in Consolidating Peace and Democracy in the Great Lakes Region, October 2007.

¹⁰ <http://www.mcc.gov/press/releases>.